DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 060 832 JC 720 076

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TITLE Community Colleges and Non-Traditional Study.
PUB DATE Jul 71
NOTE 18p.; Speech presented to the Sixth Annual Conference for Community College Presidents held at Charlotte, North Carolina, July 25-28, 1971 and sponsored by the Univ. of North Carolina and the State Board of Education

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *College Role; *Educational Innovation; Educational Needs; *Experimental Colleges; *Innovation; Instructional Innovation; *Junior Colleges; Speeches

ABSTRACT

The author, Chairman of the National Commission on Non-Traditional Study, points out that the community college has a unique but undeveloped opportunity in the area of non-traditional study. The traditional view that only private institutions are and can be innovative must be altered since: (1) the line dividing public and private institutions is becoming increasingly blurred; (2) the record of private colleges bringing about innovative educational change is spotty; and (3) the private colleges serve a dwindling percent of the total population and only institutions forced to deal with large numbers can be expected to explore new methods of education. The community college, still new enough to be flexible, more readily reaches populations who have encountered barriers to traditional education and are, therefore, interested in non-traditional study. Other aspects of the community college conducive to non-traditional study are the lack of time limits on degrees and courses and its experience in counseling a wide variety of students. The author concludes by listing 17 societal needs to be fulfilled by the community college. (MN)

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ED 060832

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDY

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JC 720 076

A Speech Presented To The Presidents of North Carolina
Community Junior Colleges, Sixth Annual Conference
July, 1971

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

APR 19 1972

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I feel very much at home with you today on two counts: first, that you have invited me to talk about non-traditional study, which is much a part of my current concern and which I have defended and encouraged for many years; second, that you are representatives of community colleges, which have similarly been part of my own educational involvement. With forty community colleges as a great segment of the State University of New York, where I labored for some time, I cannot feel other than very close to your problems and your dreams. I submit, then, that my credentials are at least sympathetic, if not competent.

Perhaps it will be helpful to today's discussion if I sketch briefly the nature of the National Commission on Non-Traditional Study. It is supported by a grant of the Carnegie Corporation to cover two years and is sponsored jointly by the Educational Testing Service and the College Entrance Examination Board. This relationship with three major organizations, however, in no way affects the independent actions and conclusions of the Commission, its interpretation of any and all findings, or the nature of any recommendations it chooses to make. I mention this because the independent nature of the Commission is important to remember. It is also important to know that the Commission's twenty-six members were chosen not as representatives of organizations but rather because of their own individual experience and what this experience could mean in making judgments

and offering stimulating and creative ideas. Two of its members, for example, Leland Medsker and Joseph Cosand, are among the most knowledgeable in the country in the area of community colleges.

For its first phase of investigation the Commission has organized itself into six subcommittees, each for the purpose of examining in a preliminary way one aspect of non-traditional study, both for data gathering and for ideas that evolve from the data. Each subcommittee has staff assigned to it to provide assistance in this task. There are subcommittees on the concept of non-traditional study, on opportunities for access, on the means now used or possible for the future, on models of study now functioning or beirg planned, on types of recognition including the external degree, and on the problems of finance. Two meetings of the full Commission have already been held, the second as recently as last week.

The Commission is approaching its task without any substantive pre-conceptions other than its full awareness of how necessary it is in these times to re-think and evaluate the new demands being made on higher education. Those demands relate equally to the numbers and types of students to be accommodated, the methods to be used, and the quality to be maintained or improved. At this point we have no answers to give, only questions to explore. And we are determined that once there are promising answers to examine, we will bend every effort on the basis of such promise to encourage action of sufficient significance to have an impact on higher education's future. We wish neither to be reactionary nor

to be revolutionary; we wish rather to be a catalytic agent in increasing the pace at which evolutionary educational changes can take place.

Obviously our mission has great relevance to the work and plans of community colleges throughout the land. This is one reason I am so pleased to have this occasion to meet with you. And I should like to devote a good portion of my remarks to some of the logical and even unique opportunities for the community college in creating and testing non-traditional approaches to education. Before doing this, however, let me say a few general words about the place of the community college in American higher education.

II.

I shall take it as a basic assumption that we all agree upon and are cheered by the growth of the community college movement in this country, a movement I believe to be the single most important development in higher education during the past three decades. Together with the land-grant college movement which began more than a century ago, it represents educational concepts that are uniquely American.

An important element of this assumption is that of insisting that the community college <u>is</u> part of the process of higher education. Thus it should be identified in juxtaposition to the other elements: the four-year undergraduate institution, the specialized college, the graduate or professional school. Such identification turns the community college's face forward rather than backward.

This is not a new concept, but I call attention to it again because its importance will be even greater during the next two decades. A large number of college-age students are now finding the community college suitable to their needs; a far larger number of adults will also look to community colleges as the means to continue or renew their educational experience. As this occurs, the wisdom of having this part of higher education linked organizationally in the closest possible ways to the rest of the higher education pattern will become more and more apparent.

There is a danger incipient in this concept, however, and it should not be overlooked. Some community colleges believe that by placing themselves squarely in higher education they can turn their backs on everything other than a general or liberal arts education, thus making themselves closer kin to their four-year brethren. When this belief begins to dominate the thinking of community colleges so that every other type of educational service seems beneath their notice, the whole community college movement will lose its dynamic force. And if this belief does <u>not</u> dominate at the present time, the fact should be made clear to everyone concerned.

An essential ingredient in the development of community colleges, therefore, is the creation of regular and systematic means to acquaint the general public with their true purposes and ambitions. There should be conferences all over this State at which the characteristics and values of these institutions are thoroughly discussed, conferences at

which citizens are given deeper insights into the tasks the community colleges are endeavoring to perform. Their individual differences and their diversity of programs according to regional need should point all the more clearly to their uniqueness in the pattern of higher education and their total concern for the public good.

Clear presentation of purposes, goals, and programs cannot help but surround community colleges with an aura of maturity and stability that bolsters not only their own confidence but that of the community itself. It permanently lays the ghost of imitative desire, the yearning to emulate the traditional four-year institution. It causes the colleges to be more flexible in their approaches and more catholic in their offerings without worrying about criticisms that they are being untraditional. The only criticism that should ever concern community college faculties and administrators is one that accuses them of having less than the best quality in any program being offered. Whether courses are general or vocational, cultural or technical, long or short, degree-granting or nondegree-granting, day or evening, conventionally or unconventionally taught, should be of no consequence to community colleges so long as they are certain that what they do is consistently excellent. To fulfill their role with this certainty is the greatest possible service to their students and the community.

The community college stands in a strategically pivotal location between secondary and advanced education. In the first place, it comes

closer in practice to the democratic ideal of full educational opportunity than does any other level of higher education. The large numbers of students it accommodates and the ways it finds to accommodate them open doors to hitherto unfulfilled opportunities. It has within it, therefore, an influence already very real to say nothing of a future potential that has all sorts of educational hope within it. Furthermore, it is a great seasoning and testing ground for determining and acting upon the capabilities of students of all ages. In this way it enriches the possibilities for every individual and moves us as a people more closely to the goal of a totally informed, trained, and educated public.

If the community college is to fulfill the spirit of its mission, it will have to be unequivocal in insisting upon high standards - of program, of teaching, of learning. And to do this it will need the deepest kind of understanding and the strongest kind of support from its sponsors. Money spent on poor or mediocre education is money wasted; it leads only to mediocre results and mediocre people.

It is wise to remember that excellence is not equated with the different levels of education. Moving up from one rung of the educational ladder to another does not mean that one goes up the ladder of excellence. Excellence, in fact, should be considered in terms of a total concern, a concern for people in all walks of life, including those for whom a lesser amount of formal education is necessary or possible. It is not at all a matter to be linked to a certain social status; it should characterize

the technique of every artisan as well as the vision of every artist.

One danger we face in America is that of forgetting there is dignity in all work and excellence is the goal of everyone regardless of status. We suffer from an "executive" complex these days, except for those in the young generation who have completely rejected our way of life. Virtually everyone yearns to be a leader, but in so doing, he forgets that leaders must have people to lead. If there is to be a foreman, there must be laborers; if there is to be a captain, there must be soldiers; if there is to be a manager, there must be those he is to manage. And the most important point is that all of us, leaders or followers, foremen or laborers, captains or soldiers, managers or workers - all of us have the same goal of excellence. This consists in performing a task to the maximum of one's ability, regardless of what that task may be. The shoemaker who exhibits the skill of his craft in the fine shoes he creates is a better example of excellence than the college graduate who performs his duties in perfunctory fashion.

Excellence and social status, therefore, have no real relationship. Excellence and education have relationship only when we think of education as one out of many aspects of our lives. The people who recognize this and who honor excellence wherever it may be found are a truly democratic people.

Education in America has more to motivate it than the creation of a social or intellectual elite. It reaches to all its citizenry, up or down as the case may be, but always to make of each person all he should become. Community colleges, and indeed all of public higher education, are still haunted by the cruel myth that one attends such institutions only as a last

resort and because their standards of performance are inferior. This comes out of an early tradition in the eastern part of our country, which historically has given preeminence to the private college and university. It is a quite understandable myth, given the history of higher education's development. But when this now ceases to be history and is made part of the contemporary scene, it becomes not only a cruel myth but a dangerous one, as well. And the only way to scotch and destroy it is for public education to be clear in formulating its objectives and resolute in insisting on excellence as the essential component in meeting them.

Community colleges which are so armed with a sense of direction and purpose and with a concern for excellence cannot help but become close partners to other elements of the community. They will not only be accepted; they will be called upon more and more often to provide the educational and cultural leadership for the region. In addition, they will draw closer to the other institutions in higher education, who will look upon them with new respect and admiration.

There is not the slightest doubt that community colleges will continue to multiply throughout the country. There is not the slightest doubt that they will serve an increasingly large percentage of our people. But these two facts should intensify the responsibility of the community college to be more than an imitator and to gear itself to the most important democratic experiment in higher education, one that leads to proof of the validity of the American theory that all should be educated who are capable of benefiting thereby.

If it can carry on such a task with consistent excellence, the community college will have performed a national service second to none and will have silenced its detractors forever. Furthermore, its own untrammeled spirit and verve and the innovations these engender will have given all the rest of higher education an infusion of freshness and relevance long needed.

III.

Coming now more specifically to the consideration of the community college in its relationship to non-traditional study, I am convinced that it has unique opportunities as yet comparatively undeveloped. This is not to say that all the impetus toward non-traditional study is the responsibility of the community college alone. The other levels of higher education unquestionably have much important work to do. But the community college is in many ways the bellwether in such a movement because of many of its already evident characteristics. I think we should look at these rather carefully today and test the validity of my conviction.

The long-held and traditional view in educational circles is that only private institutions are and can be innovative. All or almost all experimentation in programs or methods is presumably concentrated within these and is expected to remain there. This is one strong reason out of many for their preservation and support. In these times of acute financial stringency, it is a reason that has been brought forward more and more often. And there is logic in such a reason, since the independent colleges are free to innovate as they wish without worrying about criticism from the taxpayer.

But there are two factors that are altering this view considerably, perhaps even three factors. One is that the line between private and public institutions is becoming increasingly blurred. Private colleges are discovering that their financial needs require them to ask for state and federal assistance of many kinds. They are receiving such help indirectly and directly, and they will receive more and new kinds in the years to come in order that our educational system may still be based on the principle of diversity. The help takes the form of tax exemptions, loans for physical facilities, scholarship grants to students, direct allocations of money for operations, and special incentives for expansion. This help will grow in size and will have new features added to it as time goes on, and it will be accepted not only willingly but enthusiastically by the recipients. It will also carry with it a new attention to accountability for expenditure of funds, a new management component in the lives of many of these institutions.

Whether all this is good or bad is beside my immediate point. I am merely stating a fact of educational life that will become more apparent during the next decade. The private institution will soon be under many of the same restrictions as is the public one and will have to think very carefully before it indulges itself in innovative practices where failure is just as possible as is success. Both types of institution will be in much the same situation; the only difference will be the traditional tendency of private foundations to support the private institution. And this may not be enough to make a significant difference.

The second factor is that the record of the private college in bringing about innovative educational change is a spotty one. It has often made claims of boldness, of freshness of point of view, of adaptation to change without documenting its claims too well. And it has sometimes maintained that its concern is largely with the so-called traditional student, sometimes even a particular type of traditional student, so that its experimentation is limited to very particular needs. There are exceptions, of course, but the number of exceptions are small relative to the number of institutions who adhere to the time-honored roles and concepts.

And there may be a third factor, also, this one relating to the sheer volume of the educational need. The private college- excellent, mediocre, or poor - is dealing with a steadily dwindling percentage of the total population to be educated. Its efforts toward innovation are not necessarily designed to deal with problems of mass education in which quality must be maintained while hundreds of thousands of people are to be accommodated. Only the institution forced to deal with large numbers can be expected to explore new methods for educating them. I say this not as a criticism of the private college but as a statement of reality.

If we were to agree on all this (and there are many who will not), the necessity for public higher education to be bolder, more experimental , more innovative becomes apparent. It will have to shoulder a larger share of the burden of educational exploration simply because a large share of the problems, either self-created or forced upon it, are within its own borders and are, therefore, its particular responsibility. And the beginnings of

solutions for some of these problems are in many instances more logically attainable within the structure and philosophy of the community college than anywhere else.

By its very conception the community college is a step ahead of other institutions in its concern for full opportunity in education. To justify its existence it must be close to the people of the community; it has no chance for survival and growth otherwise. And if it intends to expand upon the fullness of that educational opportunity, the community college will now have to link itself closely with other agencies of the community - cultural, social, business - and develop cooperative and coordinated ways to serve student populations of many kinds and with varied needs. As this occurs, it will become so involved and absorbed and excited with these broader possibilities that it will lose any existing desire to imitate the four-year college or to concentrate on being a glorified preparatory school for the latter.

I sometimes wonder whether the community college is truly aware of its own potential power and the great areas of educational service that stretch ahead. And I wonder also whether it recognizes fully its unique characteristics that give it such a huge role in helping to bring about a far more rapidly paced set of solutions in educational philosophy and practice. At a time when swift changes are necessary the community college can lead the way more quickly and can join with others to make a broad front of leadership that other levels of higher education will find impossible to ignore. Such changes and such leadership are bound to encompass many of the approaches to learning which we are calling non-traditional.

The simple fact that the community college is new enough in concept to be unfettered by tradition is a great plus. It is free to be flexible in its program offerings and in the methods by which the offerings are made. It can have breadth and diversity within the single institution through these programs and a corresponding breadth and diversity among its faculty as well. It reaches more readily the kinds of populations who are naturally interested in non-traditional study because the traditional ways raise barriers for them. Whether the barriers are those of time or place or finances or program rigidities or credit requirements or residential necessities does not really matter very much; whatever their types may be, they effectively shut the doors on many people in all walks of life who are eager for more education and could be the better for it. In a democratic nation, people should be screened into educational opportunities, not screened out of them because of a residue of elitist customs.

It should be remembered also that the community college has already acquired status as an existing institution, enough status to be listened to and watched with respect if and when it moves toward creating some of the new educational forms for learning that are so badly needed. These are needed for one reason because they are the only hopes we have for accommodating to the pressures of numbers without building and staffing ourselves beyond the ability of communities or states to support us. Just as important, they are needed because they may well bring about a re-examination of how we now educate and train, and a realization that there are other, equally good, and sometimes better ways.

The community college ordinarily has no fetish of time limits to worry about, whether we think of completion time for a degree, length or shortness of a particular course, or occasions when formal educational work of the student may be interrupted by his necessity or choice. It thus offers another basic characteristic that can be conducive to encouraging non-traditional study since this kind of study opens a whole series of new or revised options for the student. A community college that does not develop such options is a contradiction in terms and title.

I shall say nothing about the practical possibilities offered by the community college to any student because it is so much more economical for him to attend. Nor shall I say anything about how the student can mature more quickly and be more quickly motivated when the adolescent trappings of higher education are removed. These are large subjects in and of themselves. I shall instead make only one final point: that the experience of the community college in guiding and counseling its students, a vital necessity to any non-traditional aspects of education, gives it a tremendous advantage over other institutions of higher education in undertaking an individualized learning process. It has always taken counseling of students very seriously, not as a way of making them dependent but rather of making their aims more explicit in their own minds and of evaluating their capabilities realistically with them. This experience is all the more valuable now, when it must be applied to new segments of society for whom more education has been a vague, inchoate desire rather than a clearly seen direction.

The community college has great, new constituencies to serve. I seriously doubt that it can do so without looking hard at its present practices and adapting, revising, and expanding these practices to include non-traditional means. If the needs of contemporary society are to be met, it will be only through a willingness to break with past traditions and to think boldly of many combinations and patterns that do not follow conventional thought.

It will mean, for example, the establishment of courses of varying lengths to meet specific vocational training needs.

It will mean the closest kind of correlation between the curricular development of the community college and the obvious requirements of the community.

It will mean, through skillful applications of the mass media and other devices, the use of the home as an adjunct to college education.

It will mean a steady expansion of work-and-study arrangements within the community.

It will mean building liberalizing elements into all technical studies.

It will mean more use of qualified part-time instructors drawn from business, industry, and the arts to guarantee professional strength and relevance in what is offered to students.

It will mean giving certificates as well as giving degrees.

It will mean carefully devised programs of in-service development for faculty.

It will mean constant communication with four-year colleges and with secondary schools to help make the student's education a continuous rather

than a set of disparate experiences.

It will mean concentrating more heavily on principles that underlie subject matter rather than on techniques alone in order to guard against the quick obsolescence and unadaptability of the worker.

It will mean new emphasis on cultural leadership in the community and added sharing of artistic and intellectual talent.

It will mean individualized learning encouraged by proper counseling and careful evaluations.

It will mean searching out and caring for new segments of the community's population, hitherto denied or ignored or discouraged.

It will mean becoming a partner with many other partners in the community in fashioning a broad set of educational opportunities.

It will mean also becoming a partner with other educational institutions in sharing many kinds of resources.

It will mean explaining and explaining to all who will listen why the community college is important, why its purposes are sound, and why its goals are realistic.

It will mean, in other words, being alert to every changing pattern of our society and creating forms of education to meet the demands these patterns bring about.

These are only some of the things that need to be done, but they are enough to illustrate the scope of the task and the magnitude of its implications. Whether the means are traditional or non-traditional is unimportant. What

matters is that the opportunities and means for learning be increased and be readily available to those who need them. If providing these means causes problems for us, we should rejoice in such problems since they represent an eagerness for learning, for enlightenment, for wisdom, the sort of eagerness for which we have always hoped. Now that it exists, we must meet it with an equal eagerness of our own to open new vistas of opportunity to those who rely on us.